Quoting the Language of Nature in Karl Kraus's Satires

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I. The Other Language of Satire

Perhaps more so than other literary forms, satire depends on an external referent: the more ignoble it determines the object of its ridicule to be, the more derisive is the invective it unleashes. Fredric Bogel has recently compared the signature gesture of the satirist to that of an officer or a judge: "The act of exclusion or expulsion requires a firm line to be drawn between inside and outside, expeller and expelled . . . as one might argue that the point of arresting and incarcerating criminals is not only to restrain them but also to clarify the line between legal and illegal behavior" (Bogel 68). The satirist as adjudicator or incarcerator would, indeed, be an apt characterization of the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus (1876–1934), for whom satire was less an individual genre than a trans-generic mode of expression informing the various literary forms that make up his oeuvre: the aphorism, the gloss, the essay, and the drama. The question thus often raised when addressing his writings is from what source or sources does Kraus draw his unwavering authorial voice? Or, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, an early reader of Kraus: on what firm ground does the satirist stand when passing his judgments?[1]

The "ground" on which Kraus stands, as many have argued—Benjamin earlier than most—is his notorious practice of quotation.[2] By satirically reproducing the language of others in a new context—most often journalists, politicians, bureaucrats, and the *Literaten*—Kraus aims to delegitimize or reveal the absurdity of what was intended in the quotation's initial instantiation. In each one of these quotations Kraus thus bears witness to a *corpus delicti* (*gs ii*, 349); in this way alone, he incarcerates his criminals. As the scholar Wilhelm

Hindemith has written, Kraus "besteht darauf, dass das Unmenschliche, das Unbeschreibliche nicht in Begriffe zu fassen, nicht zu erklären ist. Es ist bloß darzustellen" (8). To "put on display" is to place in quotation, as Hindemith essentially repeats Kraus's own self-description: "Mein Amt war, die Zeit in Anführungszeichen zu setzen, in Druck und Klammern sich verzerren zu lassen, wissend, daß ihr Unsäglichstes nur von ihr selbst gesagt werden konnte. Nicht auszusprechen, nachzusprechen, was ist" (*Die Fackel* 400, 46, 1914).

In this article, however, I will focus on Kraus's other, less "punitive" mode of quotation. There are moments in his journal *Die Fackel* in which Kraus appears to be not quoting an individual in the literal sense but nonetheless invoking a language that is not entirely his own.[3] This language is what I preliminarily call the language of nature, a figure that occupies a privileged position throughout Kraus's oeuvre, without, however, being reducible to a single image or concept. Broadly stated, Kraus almost always presents natural disasters as agents of vengeance, and animals and forests frequently appear in *Die Fackel* as victims of humanity's crimes. But while the invocation of nature's wrath is, indeed, a trope of the genre of satire, what I insist on here is that its Krausian variant be understood within the larger framework of his practice of quotation.[4] If Kraus normally plucks the "empty phrase" out of the morass of idle chatter known to him as the press, then in the form of quotation soon to be unfolded, Kraus moves in the opposite direction in his attempt to give language to the speechless, thereby revealing a counterpart to his otherwise satirical persona.

Scholars such as Alexander Gelley, Christian Schulte, and Sigrid Weigel have offered recent accounts of the peculiar relationship between Benjamin and Kraus, drawing their insights primarily from Benjamin's glosses on the satirist and from the seminal essay, "Karl Kraus," which Benjamin composed in 1931 (see Gelley, Schulte, and Weigel). While I, too, will draw from this essay and from these scholars' respective contributions to the discourse, it is Benjamin's earlier speculations on language that provide the more immediate theoretical foundation for how I interpret Kraus's linguistic invocation of nature. In his essay "Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (1916), Benjamin writes, "Es ist eine metaphysische Wahrheit, daß alle Natur zu klagen begönne, *wenn Sprache ihr verliehen würde*. (Wobei 'Sprache verleihen' allerdings mehr ist als 'machen, daß sie sprechen kann')" (*gs ii*, 155, emphasis added). As he does elsewhere in his early works, Benjamin here states three distinct but related "metaphysical" propositions: that

the natural world possesses no language of its own; that if language were bestowed upon it, nature would immediately begin to lament; and that bestowing language upon nature is not the same as making nature speak.

What I suggest is that despite the pretense of metaphysics, which would normally preclude these judgments from containing critical or analytical potential, the distinction Benjamin is trying to make between these two modalities of communicating the language of nature is that between invoking nature's non-anthropocentric, transcendental language of mourning and making nature speak with a language that is the mere reflection of reified human subjectivity. To be sure: by relying on Benjamin's hermeneutic framework, I am not suggesting that Kraus is somehow able to commune in an unmediated manner with the natural world. Rather, Benjamin's distinction posits the theoretical possibility that there are two opposing ways to impart the language of nature, the former being preferable to the latter because it liberates rather than suppresses. Kraus's various attempts to invoke nature's language of mourning illuminate, I argue, the critical stakes involved in Benjamin's distinction. As I will later show, Kraus's methods also speak to other theoretical discourses on the relationships linking nature, language, and satire.

Kraus scholars have agreed that nature plays an important role in Kraus's thought. Edward Timms, for example, has argued that the rhetoric of a prelapsarian state of nature permeates Kraus's World War I writings (*Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist* 244–56). Referring more specifically to Kraus's relationship to law, Nike Wagner has written, "Dabei wird klar, daß der Kraussche Begriff des Rechts immer einen Bezug zum Naturrecht bzw. zu einer natürlichen Gerechtigkeit hat" (106). And Kurt Krolop takes this notion further when he argues that Kraus's satire is saturated with the "Pathos eines Naturanwalts" (19). What I view as the collective shortcoming of these claims, however, is that they converge and terminate at the identification of something like a fixed cultural or political disposition in Kraus.[5] Even if unintentionally, these claims pave the way for misleading reproaches leveled against Kraus: that, for example, his idealization of nature bordered on nature worship or that nature is, for him, always a point or place of temporal return. By contrast, this article shows how Kraus's variegated invocations of nature constitute a structural component of his literary apparatus and do not reflect deep-seated, inflexible, or reactionary convictions.

That nature is not one but many things in Kraus complicates the matter and makes it interesting; however, that there are enough shared qualities

even within the distinct iterations of the term is what enables me to subsume it under the same category. In what follows, I first turn to Kraus's essay "Apokalypse (*Offener Brief an das Publikum*)" (1908) before addressing a polemical exchange between Kraus and a former *Fackel* subscriber regarding a missive written by Rosa Luxemburg. I conclude the section on Kraus's defense of the natural world by analyzing a few scenes from his satirical tragedy *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (1915–1922). In the next section, I discuss to what extent nature shifts in signification for Kraus when it is transposed onto the aesthetic sphere, specifically as disclosed in Kraus's literary polemic against Heinrich Heine (1910). What I will ultimately show is that at various moments and through this peculiar form of quotation, Kraus reveals himself to be not just an oppositional satirist lashing out against modernity but a more nuanced critic of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman world, both in the ecological as well as the aesthetic sense.

II. Trees, Leaves, and Feathers

> Nur ein gerissener Wilddieb kann ein sehr guter Waldhüter sein.
> Golo Mann, on Kraus, cited in Pfäfflin 182

Read metaphorically, Mann suggests that only the "poacher" Kraus, who understands the language of journalism all too well, is capable of defeating his opponents at their own game. But Mann's words can also be taken more literally: Forests contain trees, out of which newspaper is made, on which words are imprinted. For Mann, then, Kraus steals the words of others only in order to protect the forest of language from intruders and other sources of destruction, namely journalists. Language is, as it were, Kraus's most prized natural resource; he once described it as "die einzige Chimäre, deren Trugkraft ohne Ende ist" (*F* 885, 4, 1932). When one thus considers that Kraus views the overproduction of newspapers to be a flagrant abuse of the natural world, his identification with the forest ranger appears uncannily literal.[6]

Kraus's "Apokalypse," which appeared in the October 1908 issue of *Die Fackel*, perhaps best illustrates Mann's claim above. In this jeremiad against both the excesses of the Viennese press as well as the public demand that Kraus deliver an "opinion" on issues of social import, Kraus distinguishes himself unconditionally from the journalist, the politician, and the aesthete, all of whom he holds to be one and the same and therefore equally respon-

sible for bringing Vienna one step closer to its ruination. As an augur of the approaching catastrophe, however, Kraus imputes to the press what appears to be environmental negligence:

> Wo einst ragende Bäume den Dank der Erde zum Himmel hoben, türmen sich Sonntagsauflagen. Hat man nicht ausgerechnet, daß eine große Zeitung für eine einzige Ausgabe eine Papiermasse braucht, zu deren Herstellung zehntausend Bäume von zwanzig Meter Höhe gefällt werden mußten? Es ist schneller nachgedruckt als nachgeforstet. Wehe, wenn es so weit kommt, daß die Bäume bloß täglich zweimal, aber sonst keine Blätter tragen! (*F* 261, 3, 1908)

While punning on the word "Blatt" as he refers to the phenomenon of the twice-daily press, Kraus testifies to the eradication of an unspecified forest, whose once-towering trees have been, quite literally, replaced by a towering stack of newspapers. Kraus implies that if silent, dignified nature (*Blatt* as "leaf") is going to be converted into some form of what I will call, for the moment, culture (*Blatt* as "page"), the product should yield something that is somehow commensurate with what nature has provided in its more incipient form: in the case of foliage, then, shade, protection, and sustenance. For Kraus, however, the newspaper provides the exact opposite; it disseminates mendacity, spreads propaganda, and as he will later make clear in his wartime writings, destroys the bonds between peoples and nations. It is then not the felling of trees that Kraus identifies as the crime—Kraus is not a bulwark against the destruction of nature at all costs—but rather the unjustified conversion of trees into newspapers. The language of these trees has been, for Kraus, "*misquoted*" by being turned into the prolix nonsense of journalese; in Benjaminian terms, the trees have been made to speak, rather than endowed with language.

Criminality can be found, for Kraus, most often in the acts that go unpunished by empirical bodies of law, which is why he often attributes to the nonlegal sphere of nature a meta-legal, retaliatory disposition. Accordingly, Kraus continues, "Die mißhandelte Urnatur grollt; sie empört sich dagegen, daß sie die Elektrizität zum Betrieb der Dummheit geliefert haben soll. Habt ihr die Unregelmäßigkeiten der Jahreszeiten wahrgenommen? Kein Frühling kommt mehr, seitdem die Saison mit solcher Schmach erfüllt ist!" (*F* 261, 6). Betrampled nature has suddenly been transformed into a force that avenges the misuse of its bounty. It first rebels against the exploitation of raw energy

by those who are incapable of using it for intelligent and moral ends; then the poor quality of the the atrical season (*Saison*) violently upsets the regularity of the natural season (*Jahreszeit*). With this wordplay, as with the pun on *Blatt* in the first quotation, Kraus insists on the indebtedness of cultural production to the natural world on which it invariably depends, an indebtedness that Kraus's language does not allow us to forget in its overlapping of semantic associations.[7] While it could only remain on the level of hypothesis to assume that Kraus truly believed that nature possessed such a vindictive sense of agency, it could be stated with certainty that in the examples above, Kraus tries to extract himself from the scene of the text and speak from the perspective of the natural and quite explicitly nonhuman world.[8] This voice reveals itself to be that of a "cosmic dissatisfaction":

> Eine kosmische Unzufriedenheit gibt sich allenthalben kund; Sommerschnee und Winterhitze demonstrieren gegen den Materialismus, der das Dasein zum Prokrustesbett macht, Krankheiten der Seele als Bauchweh behandelt und das Antlitz der Natur entstellen möchte, wo immer er ihrer Züge gewahr wird: an der Natur, am Weibe, und am Künstler [. . .]. Aber unsereins nimmt ein Erdbeben als Protest gegen die ErrungenschaÈen des Fortschritts ohne weiteres hin und zweifelt keinen Augenblick an der Möglichkeit, dass ein Übermass menschlicher Dummheit die Elemente empören könnte. (*F* 261, 2–3)

Irregularities in the natural world along with tectonic eruptions are described here as reactions against a certain type of modern "materialism" that makes the non-identical identical, invents remedies for melancholy and other "diseases of the soul" (here Kraus is probably referring to psychoanalysis), and "distorts" nature's countenance on those individuals whom Kraus deems to be victims of an oppressive modernity. But the "elements," Kraus asserts, can only remain dormant for so long. What I suggest is that the voice of satire appears to be mimicking the rumbling and seething of these natural elements, and it is utterances like these that probably prompted Elias Canetti to write that Kraus was a "Vorläufer der Atombombe, ihre Schrecken waren schon in seinem Wort" (44). Here, rather, Kraus's voice seems to converge with the elements of nature. I will return to this point toward the end of the article. For now, I would suggest that there is a mimetic quality to the Kraus passage that resonates with what Benjamin calls the "unsinnliche Ähnlichkeiten" between

language and the material world (*gs ii*, 204–10). Kraus's language, in other words, is trying not simply to describe the otherness of nature but actually to imitate this very otherness in the attempt to invoke its wrathful language.

Kraus also deals, however, with the animal world, which can be seen most vividly in his treatment of a letter composed by Rosa Luxemburg in a female prison in Breslau, a letter Kraus describes as "dieses im deutschen Sprachbereich einzigartige Dokument von Menschlichkeit und Dichtung" (*F* 546, 8, 1920). Written in December 1917 and addressed to Sonia Liebknecht, this letter expresses Luxemburg's sympathy not with her fellow inmates but with the helpless buåalo that were being whipped senselessly by the prison guards. While he finds the entirety of Luxemburg's letter to be of incomparable aesthetic and ethical value, Kraus singles out one particular line of wrenching beauty: "Sonitschka, die Büåelhaut ist sprichwörtlich an Dicke und Zähigkeit, und *die ward zerrissen*" (*F* 546, 8, 1920). Kraus's polemic revolves around a response to the publication of this letter in *Die Fackel* by an aristocrat and former subscriber who largely denounces Luxemburg as a hysterical woman who had no business intervening in the aåairs of war. Luxemburg, she writes, would have been better oå working as a "Wärterin in einem Zoologischen Garten," for her preaching of a "buåalo revolution" was most certainly falling on deaf ears. And had she only been better behaved, the letter continues, "hätte [sie] dann gewiß keine BekanntschaÈ mit Gewehrkolben gemacht" (*F* 554, 6, 1920).

Kraus begins his polemical rejoinder by defending the humanity of "d[er] gute[n] Luxemburg" against the accusations brought against her and then juxtaposes Luxemburg's humanity against both the bestiality of the prison guards and the destructive ignorance, vis-à-vis botanical matters, of the aristocratic woman who condemns her. Kraus writes:

> Zu Betrachtungen, wie viel ersprießlicher und erfreulicher das Leben der Luxemburg verlaufen wäre, wenn sie sich als Wärterin in einem Zoologischen Garten betätigt hätte statt als Bändigerin von Menschenbestien, von denen sie schließlich zerfleischt ward, und ob sie als Gärtnerin edler Blumen, von denen sie allerdings mehr als eine Gutsbesitzerin wußte, lohnendere und befriedegendere BeschäÈigung gefunden hätte [. . .] wird [. . .] kein Atemzug langen. (*F* 554, 9, 1920)

Benjamin has famously interpreted the function of Krausian quotation in juridical-theological terms: "Im rettenden und strafenden Zitat erweist die

Sprache sich als die Mater der Gerechtigkeit" (*gs ii*, 363). But in his unfinished *Passagen-Werk* (1927–1940), he specifies precisely how quotation would appear in a work that has been stripped of all subjective judgment or commentary: "Diese Arbeit muß die Kunst, ohne Anführungszeichen zu zitieren, zur höchsten Höhe entwickeln" (*gs v*, 572). Kraus's polemical response above, I would argue, seems to contain not only the redemptive and punitive aspects of quotation but also the unquoted aspect that Benjamin envisions in his *Passagen-Werk*. For in Kraus's passage, the quotation marks fall away as he poaches the words of both the estate owner as well as of Luxemburg. He first "punishes" the words of the former by making them appear contemptible in their new context. Here would be an example of how Kraus releases the potential of quotation to "to pierce through layers of intention, deception, and ambiguity and draw out of the fabric of language a power of judgment" (Gelley 29). But he then "redeems" Luxemburg's elegant usage of the preterite form of *werden*, "ward," which she initially used in her description of the torn buåalo skin. Kraus thereby connects the prison guard's treatment of the buffalo to Luxemburg's own fate at the hands of the German *Freikorps*— justover a year aÈer the letter was composed—through the operative word *ward*. Recalling Golo Mann's remark, Kraus shows himself in this context to be both poacher and forest ranger.

Kraus does not, however, only come to the defense of Luxemburg. Rather than relegating the animal world to a subordinate position vis-à-vis the human one, Kraus asserts that it would never occur to a goose, "einen Innsbrucker oder eine südungarische Gutsbesitzerin zu schelten," for it would have "zu viel Takt, einen schlecht geschriebenen Brief abzuschicken, und zu viel Scham, ihn zu schreiben. Keine Gans hat eine so schlechte Feder, daß sie's vermöchte!" (*F* 554, 12). Once again playing on the dual meaning of a word whose primary referent is a natural object (a feather or quill), Kraus points immediately to its criminal abuse in the hands of the aristocrat. If the goose's feather is going to be used to make a pen, Kraus suggests, then the pen's ink ought to be able to reproduce the feather's beauty, as Luxemburg was able to do in her missive, which, for Kraus, so accurately describes the vain suåering of the animal world during a time of war. Thus, much like the trees that Kraus earlier claimed were lamentably converted into newspapers (*Die Fackel*, to be sure, excepted from this formulation), Kraus is not inveighing against technology *tout court*—that is, against the harnessing of natural resources for human ends—but against any use of nature that cannot justify its sacrifice. Kraus

then not only quotes the deceased Luxemburg but also attempts to speak on behalf of the goose, whose true language, Kraus implies, has been understood by Luxemburg but not by the landowner, the latter of whom treats the animal merely as a thing to be consumed: The goose "ist intelligent, von Natur gutmütig und mag von ihrer Besitzerin gegessen, aber nicht mit ihr verwechselt sein" (*F* 554, 12). Over the course of this *Fackel* entry, Kraus thus transitions from direct quotation (of the estate owner) to quotation without quotation marks (of Luxemburg) and, finally, to what I would call indirect quotation without quotation marks (of nature).

The examples above link Kraus's linguistic gestures to those of a *Naturanwalt*, whose task it is to advocate on nature's behalf by arraigning its human inhabitants or by suggesting that what appear to be contingent, natural disasters are actually responses to an illicit culture that has failed to establish an ethical relationship with nature. As I alluded to earlier, it would be difficult to map Kraus's position onto a traditional political spectrum; what I suggest, however, is that for him, crimes against nature are always committed—these are merely the result of human action. The question is whether these crimes can or cannot be justified in the realm of culture, that is, whether these sacrifices of nature serve ethical ends.

In *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, the Nörgler claims to have written a tragedy, "deren untergehender Held die Menschheit ist; deren tragischer Konflikt als der der Welt mit der Natur tödlich endet" (*Itm*, 671). During World War I, Europe's crimes have only accumulated and are now placed in more visible relief against the muted language of nature, which is given dramatic form for the first time. In the penultimate scene, the Nörgler dictates:

> Der Wunsch, die genaue Zeit festzustellen, die ein im Walde stehender Baum braucht, um sich in eine Zeitung zu verwandeln, hat dem Besitzer einer Harzer Papierfabrik den Anlaß zur Ausführung eines interessanten Experiments gegeben. [. . .] Demnach hatte es nur eines Zeitraumes von 3 Stunden 25 Minuten bedurfte, damit das Publikum die neuesten Nachrichten auf dem Material lesen konnte, das von den Bäumen stammte, auf deren Zweigen die Vögel noch am Morgen ihre Lieder gesungen hatten.
>
> *Von draußen, ganz von weitem her, der Ruf:——bee!* (*Itm*, 670).

Here, as in many places in the drama, the stage direction serves a crucial function, as the morning song of the birds and the evening screech of the newsboy

("Aus— ga—*bee*!") are immediately juxtaposed against one another. While the former could be understood as the Benjaminian lament of nature, which nonetheless appears as a beautiful song to the human ear, the Nörgler laments the latter, which intones the news of war at the beginning and end of almost every act. Kraus is generally merciless in his dramatic opus, but he reserves sympathy for the voice of nature spoken from the grave, as in the case of "Der tote Wald," a character in the drama's last scene who utters:

> Durch eure Macht, durch eure Mühn
> bin ich ergraut. Einst war ich grün
> Seht meine jetzige Gestalt.
> Ich war ein Wald! Ich war ein Wald!
> [. . .]
> Fluch euch, die das mir angetan!
> Nie wieder steig ich himmelan!
> Wie war ich grün. Wie bin ich alt.
> Ich war ein Wald! Ich war ein Wald! (*It m*, 722)

The graying of the forest is the conflation of two distinct, though for Kraus, always related, moments: its death as the result of battle, and its conversion into the newspaper report that distorts the news of the battle and is thus complicit in the perpetuation of the war that makes it possible. Through this, Kraus's most literal attempt to ventriloquize nature's mourning, he shows himself to be akin to the Schillerian satirist, the "avenger of nature" to which I will later return.

Thus far I have shown how Kraus responds to crimes he perceives have been committed in the material world, but it is necessary to define further what Kraus's idea of nature entails in order to determine how this figure continues to serve as an avatar for his satirical voice in other contexts. Whereas Kraus has hitherto quoted nature's hypothetical responses to its *literal* destruction, when transposing his thoughts onto the aesthetic sphere he incriminates what I would call nature's *literary* distortions. That is, by appealing to the more abstract concept of natural beauty, Kraus reveals, I argue, his ideal of poetic language and thus the blueprint of his own aesthetics, even through satirical language. Kraus's quotation of nature here assumes the form of a defense of natural beauty, and he uses his *bête noire* Heine as his nominal and historical point of departure.

III. From Nature to Natural Beauty

In the forward to "Heine und die Folgen," Kraus writes, "Diese Schrift indes, so weit entfernt von dem Verdacht, gegen Heine ungerecht zu sein, wie von dem Anspruch, ihm gerecht zu werden, ist kein literarischer Essay. Sie erschöpft das Problem Heine nicht, aber mehr als dieses" (*F* 329, 3, 1911). With this declaration Kraus aims to set himself apart from two literary camps prevalent in Vienna at the turn of the century: the Heine admirers (whom Kraus identifies with the liberal press) and the conservative and often openly anti-Semitic Heine detractors (à la the *völkisch* sentiments of Adolf Bartels).[9] What Kraus suggests above, rather, is that while Heine provides the occasion for this polemic, as a historical figure he does not exhaust the far-reaching implications of the essay in terms of its object of critique.[10] I suggest, rather, that Heine is, for Kraus, more of an aesthetic-ideological problem than a singular historical phenomenon. Edward Timms has succinctly summarized the cultural and political stakes involved in Kraus's polemic against Heine:

> Asserting that Heine's writings pander to the taste of an emergent newspaper-reading public, Kraus holds him responsible for a form of journalism, the "feuilleton," which subordinates factual reporting to a self-indulgent subjectivity. Hence the "consequences" identified in "Heine und die Folgen": a journalistic civilization in which poetry is displaced by pastiche and news is swamped by opinion. (*Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist* 394)

This is certainly true. But what I suggest is that Kraus also points to a problem in Heine's language itself, a problem that logically occurs prior to the alleged influence Heine has had on the state of journalism and literature during Kraus's day. This linguistic problem is more "Heinism" than Heine, and one cannot thus overlook the moments in the essay in which Kraus—in his role as literary critic—addresses Heine's failure as a lyric poet. In this sense, it is important not necessarily to take Kraus at his word when he writes that he did not compose a literary essay.

To return to the larger problem, how does Kraus's concept of nature undergo a shift in signification when it is displaced onto the aesthetic sphere? He offers a clue when he refers to Heine's poetry as the "Methode aller Poeterei, aller Feuilletonlyrik [. . .], die ein passendes Stück Außenwelt sucht, um eine vorrätige Stimmung abzugeben" (*F* 349, 10, 1912).[11] Here Kraus identi-

fies a problematic relationship between Heine the poetaster and the "exterior world" he attempts to poetize. On one level, Kraus simply denounces Heine's poetry (and the charlatans that have succeeded him) simply for being sentimental. But this charge takes on a new dimension in light of the larger question. For by accusing Heine's poetry of using the "exterior world" as mere fodder for the "mood" he wishes to reproduce, what Kraus implies is that in its poetic representation, the exterior world (that is, nature) is owed something that is not contained within the bounds of Heine's lyric. Heine, it seems, projects his moods onto nature and then reproduces them in his poetry as he sees fit; for Kraus, I would argue, he humanizes nature. Kraus does not object outright to the use of nature to somehow inspire the stuff of poetry, but only to the "schnöde Berufung der schon vorhandenen Welt" that is then transmitted to the reader for the sole purpose of producing what Kraus calls an "effect," or *Wirkung* (*F* 349, 11). The fundamental problem with Heine's lyric poetry is that it tries to mimic only the effect that nature's actual beauty has on an observer and is thus composed exclusively with the reader's affective response in mind. Kraus considers this a bad form of mimesis.

Heine's lyric furthermore fails because it is not what Kraus elsewhere calls the "naturnotwendige Verkörperung des Gedankens" (*F* 261, 12, 1908). Heine's language, in other words, is ornamental in that it coalesces around a predetermined "thought" rather than generate the thought out of its own linguistic constitution (recall the semantic distinction Kraus makes between *Jahreszeit* and *Saison* in "Apocalypse").[12] Kraus essentially sees in Heine a bad form of aestheticism, a false poet who creates rhymes arbitrarily and without concern for the necessary relationship between the linguistic units involved and the external referents described. In the realm of lyric poetry, Heine does not give the "nature" of his object its "necessary" due. In developing his literary aesthetics, Kraus suggests that it is the task of the poet to create a necessary relationship between word and world, not simply one between the sounds of two words. Heine's poetry lacks this very necessity, so his attempts to write lyric poetry result in merely writing *about* nature, as if nature were a speechless and stagnant entity. In his reading of Kraus on Heine, one critic comes to a similar conclusion when he writes that Kraus "präzise erhellt [. . .] den Unterschied zwischen Lyrik, die die Dinge sprechen lässt, und solcher, die über die Dinge spricht" (Schuberth 108), echoing Benjamin's distinction between endowing something with language and making something speak, as well as Kraus's own injunction to bring "Dinge zur Sprache" (*F* 287, 8, 1909).

I suggest that for Kraus, Heine's lyric "misquotes" a certain component of nature's language but a different component from that which I had been describing in the first section of this article. Recalling Benjamin's distinction between a humanizing and a nonhumanizing linguistic relationship to nature, it would seem that for Kraus, Heine sees in nature only a reflection of his own limited subjectivity, which necessarily restricts the creative capacity of his poetic language. His lyric poetry stops, then, at the mere reproduction of a reified image of nature's immediate, external *beauty*. As one critic comments, "Schönheit ist Kraus als vordergründiges, leicht zu rezipierendes Ornament verdächtig" (Kranner 87). It is what I call the language of natural beauty with which Kraus is here concerned. To understand the philosophical implications of Kraus's musings on the relationship between nature and poetic language and why he subsequently opts for Goethe over Heine as his preferred lyric poet, I turn to a few key passages in Theodor Adorno's modernist treatise *Ästhetische Theorie*.

It is no surprise that Kraus appears in Adorno's text most frequently (though not exclusively) under the heading of "natural beauty," as Adorno claims that Kraus enacted a "Hinlenkung der ästhetischen Theorie aufs Naturschöne" (*ät*, 99).[13] But rather than imputing to Kraus either an antiquated bourgeois aesthetic sensibility à la Stefan George or a politically suspect nature worship common among Kraus's contemporaries,[14] Adorno *affirms* this particular reorientation: "Wahrgenommen wird [das Naturschöne] ebenso als zwingend Verbindliches wie als Unverständliches, das seine Auflösung fragend erwartet. . . . Unter seinem Aspekt ist Kunst, anstatt Nachahmung der Natur, Nachahmung des Naturschönen" (*ät*, 111). Here Adorno posits a distinction between nature and natural beauty vis-à-vis their respective relationship to the artwork, in which natural beauty, for Adorno, finds its denouement. He argues that the authentic (modern) artwork does not imitate nature but rather what could be called its promise, by showing that "Natur, wie in ihrem Schönen zart, sterblich sich regt, *noch gar nicht ist*" (*ät*, 115, emphasis added). The work of art thus distills the essence from a nature that has not *yet* been realized: "'Ursprung ist das Ziel,' wenn irgend, dann für die Kunst," Adorno writes, citing Kraus while offering a reading of the latter's well-known aphorism (*ät*, 104). Origin, or *Ursprung*, in this context would not be a place of return but rather, more proleptically, an ideal moment that has yet to come into being: namely, I argue, the ideal of natural beauty. So concludes Adorno: "Ist die Sprache der Natur stumm, so trachtet Kunst, das Stumme zum Sprechen zu bringen" (*ät*, 115).[15]

What I suggest is that for Kraus, Heine's lyric captures a reified image of nature rather than liberating its more hidden element that hints toward its fulfillment in the ideal of natural beauty. Kraus thus turns to one of his icons, Goethe, in an attempt to invert the inherited cultural roles of the two nineteenth-century poets.[16] At a crucial moment in "Heine und die Folgen," Kraus writes:

> Wer den Lyriker auf der Suche nach weltläufigen Allegorien und beim Anknüpfen von Beziehungen zur Außenwelt zu betreten wünscht, wird Heine für den größeren Lyriker halten als Goethe. Wer aber das Gedicht als Offenbarung des im Anschauen der Natur versunkenen Dichters und nicht der im Anschauen des Dichters versunkenen Natur begreift, wird sich bescheiden, ihn als lust- und leidgeübten Techniker, als prompten Bekleider vorhandener Stimmungen zu schätzen. (*F* 329, 19, 1911)

Kraus suggests that it is not Goethe but rather the more modern Heine whose style actually betrays an inner conservatism, thereby undermining the way in which Heine was generally received by many of Kraus's contemporaries. For as a poet "immersed in nature's intuition," it is Goethe's language that reflects that something *else* in nature to which Adorno refers above; Goethe, that is, honors the nature he intends to praise without resorting to the sentimental singing of its praises or to the reproduction of his own subjective dispositions. In this sense, Goethe quotes nature's otherwise mute language—the idyllic language of natural beauty—while Heine can only quote himself. "[D]enn dort hält Natur die Stirne in die Hände," Kraus writes, referring to the gesture of the true lyric poet, "aber hier Heinrich Heine die Hand an die Wange gedrückt" (*F* 329, 20). Whereas in Heine's poetry it is always Heine who is contemplating and humanizing nature, in Goethe's, nature seems to be longing after and contemplating itself. Understood in this way, Kraus hints toward a task of the lyric poet.

At the moment that most urgently necessitates making legible the language of what Adorno calls the ideal of natural beauty, Kraus identifies in Heine an overly humanized and thus disingenuous poetic rendering of nature. As critics of modernity, Kraus and Adorno both protest, each in his own way, against the humanization of nature in art under the conditions of commodity capitalism, which for them subsumes all modes of experience, artistic and otherwise, under one reified gaze.[17] Adorno's conclusions reflect more explic-

itly his critique of capitalism than do Kraus's, but they nonetheless precisely illuminate some of the other issues at stake in Kraus's critique of Heine. Adorno thus continues: "Die Würde der Natur ist die eines noch nicht Seienden, das intentionale Vermenschlichung durch seinen Ausdruck von sich weist" (*ät*, 74). Once again, Adorno employs the trope of the "not-yet-existing" to argue that damage is visited upon nature when its beauty is taken to be not an ideal but rather an end in itself. He thus speaks to the crucial difference—in my terms, between quoting and misquoting nature in the aesthetic sphere.

For Kraus, the satirist and the lyricist—both of which Heine was not—are bound by their shared "pathos," which is what forges a direct link between Kraus and another one of his literary icons, Schiller, whom I briefly invoked earlier (*F* 329, 23). Indeed, Kraus uses an excerpt from Schiller's aesthetic treatise *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795) as an epigraph to one of his own glosses, shedding significant light on Kraus's conception of the relationship between satire and nature: "Die Dichter sind überall, schon ihrem Begriffe nach, die Bewahrer der Natur. Wo sie dieses nicht mehr sein können und schon in sich selbst den zerstörenden Einfluss willkürlicher und künstlicher Formen erfahren [. . .], da werden sie als die Zeugen und als Rächer der Natur auftreten" (*F* 443, 13, 1916).[18] Kraus, it seems, takes Schiller's description of the satirist to its logical endpoint: as nature's witness and avenger, he lashes out against what he determines to be unpardonable ecological abuses, and in his critique of Heine's lyric poetry, he detects the "licentiousness" and "artificiality" that preclude it from expressing or alluding to an ideal moment. Schiller (via Kraus) continues: "Satirisch ist der Dichter, wenn er die Entfernung von der Natur und den Widerspruch der Wirklichkeit mit dem Ideale [. . .] zu seinem Gegenstande macht" (*F* 443, 13, 1916).

Kraus invokes Schiller because he, too, identifies the satirist and the lyricist as two sides of the same coin, united by their shared vision of an ideal—not an actual—moment, if expressed in contrasting ways.[19] The important theoretical distinction Kraus posits in his polemic against Heine is that between two types of lyric poetry (and, to be sure, between two types of satire), only one of which discloses the promise or ideal of natural beauty. And thus in his affinity to both Adorno's speculations on natural beauty and Schiller's reflections on the relationship between the satirist and the lyric poet, Kraus reveals the germination of his own aesthetic theory, one that cannot be disentangled from his concept of nature.

IV. The Satirist as Natural Disaster

> Shakespeare zeichnet unmenschliche Gestalten—und Timon, die unmenschlichste unter ihnen—und sagt: solch ein Geschöpf brächte Natur hervor, wenn sie das schaffen wollte, was der Welt, wie euresgleichen sie gestaltet hat, gebührt; was ihr gewachsen, was ihr zugewachsen wäre. So ein Geschöpf ist Timon, so eins Kraus. (*gs ii*, 357)[20]

In the third section of his essay on Kraus, Benjamin calls the satirist a "non–human being" (*Unmensch*), who, paradoxically, is also "der Bote eines realeren Humanismus" (*gs ii*, 366).[21] The difference between the two figures Benjamin compares above, however, is that Timon, the misanthrope *par excellence*, truly wants to have "mit Menschen nichts mehr gemein," whereas Kraus, I would argue, simply wants nothing to do with his particular *Mitmenschen*. Nonetheless, Benjamin's likening of Kraus to a natural—or, invoking Kraus's own terminology, *naturnotwendiges*—phenomenon is relevant in the context of this article. Kraus, Benjamin continues, feels solidarity "nicht mit der schlanken Tanne, sondern mit dem Hobel, der sie verzehrt, nicht mit dem edlen Erz, sondern mit dem Schmelzofen, der es läutert" (*gs ii*, 367). By suggesting that the forces of nature actually produce the satirist as a response to the "criminal existence of men" (*gs ii*, 340), Benjamin insists on the absolute necessity of the satirical "creature," which he also likens to a cannibal and a child, and which satirizes not because it wants to but because it must.

At several junctures in his own oeuvre, Kraus himself insists that his satire is a necessary product of the world's iniquities, that it is a more transparent reflection of, and adequate response to, the affairs of the day than is the daily press, which, for Kraus, has created the world in its own image. Ventriloquized through the Nörgler in *Die Letzten Tage,* Kraus condemns the use of technology for the sole purpose of manufacturing instruments of war by claiming, "Wir werden schon sehen, daß jede Epoche die Epidemie hat, die sie verdient. Der Zeit ihre Pest!" (*lt m*, 122). What if satire, Kraus implicitly asks, is itself the epidemic or pestilence that every epoch deserves? Whereas Canetti earlier perceived in Kraus's "word" a precursor to the atomic bomb, here Kraus posits an implicit comparison between the plague and the natural disaster that satire is: unforgiving in its effect, inexplicable in its cause. Inexplicable, that is, to its victims, but not necessarily to Kraus, in whom the seemingly inscrutable language of nature finds a vessel to vent both its rage and its lament.

In this article I have tried to expand the definition of quotation in Kraus by suggesting that Kraus attempts to quote nature through the employment of various techniques: mimicry, hyperbole, wordplay, and direct polemical commentary against the abuses of poetic language. Rather than humanizing a wholly other nature, thereby rendering it all too intelligible, Kraus's satirical invocations of nature betray his attempt to create a certain distance between the natural and the human world, if only in an implicit attempt to overcome this distance upon the arrival of a "more real humanism." In this form of quotation, Kraus's violent rhetoric often reflects the violence that he perceives is being perpetrated against the natural world: the conversion of trees into insidious newspapers, the use of feathers to compose degrading missives, the poaching of nature's beauty to achieve sentimentality in lyric poetry. To paraphrase Benjamin, it is precisely at these moments that Kraus intervenes in his attempt to use language more as a medium to communicate a hidden language than as a means to a subjective end (*gs ii*, 144–45). If in his more recognizably satirical practice of quotation, Kraus renders the subjectivity of the author meaningless in his attempt to reveal a more historically grounded truth about this language without explicitly uttering it, in the type of quotation I have been describing, Kraus forgoes that first moment in order to grasp the subject-less language of nature and speak on its behalf. At particular moments in Kraus's oeuvre, the figure of nature thus constitutes the most literally *nonhuman* voice that he quotes, evincing Kraus's need to transcend the inherently false language of human subjectivity. In this way, nature serves in Kraus's work as a liminal point of critique, beyond which his voice cannot ultimately pass, despite repeated efforts to assume such a privileged position in which his satirical authority could be grounded.[22]

Notes

1. Benjamin writes that the "große Typus des Satirikers nie festeren Boden unter den Füßen gehabt [hat] als mitten in einem Geschlecht, das sich anschickt, Tanks zu besteigen und Gasmasken überzuziehen" (*gs i*, 355).

2. Hermann Broch, for example, wrote that the more Kraus developed his satiric technique, "desto sparsamer wurden seine Kommentare zu den Fakten; mehr und mehr genügte es ihm, unzählige kleinste Zeitungsausschnitte bloß durch charakterisierende Betitelungen und durch die Architektonik ihrer Zusammenstellung wirken lassen, ein weltenweites Gesamtbild erzeugend, aus dessen Komik die ganze Furchtbarkeit der Epoche mit ihren eigenen Worten zu sprechen beginnt" (192).

3. I am here referring to Benjamin's notion of the "rettenden und strafenden Zitat" (*gs ii*, 363).

4. Northrop Frye attests to this trope when he writes that the satirist (qua type) "will show us society suddenly in a telescope as posturing and dignified pygmies, or in a microscope as hideous and reeking giants, or he will change his hero into an ass and show us how humanity looks from an ass's point of view" (244).

5. Benjamin, too, is suspicious of how nature functions in Kraus's thought, rendering it incompatible with Benjamin's more Marxist-inflected theory of nature, which understands the latter as historically mediated. He writes: "Daß [Kraus] das Menschenwürdige nicht als Bestimmung und Erfüllung der befreiten—der revolutionär veränderten—Natur, sondern als Element der Natur schlechtweg, einer archaischen und geschichtlosen in ihrem ungebrochenen Ursein sich darstellt, wirft ungewisse, unheimliche Reflexe noch auf seine Idee von Freiheit und von Menschlichkeit zurück" (*gs i*, 353-54).

6. Irina Djassemy corroborates this reading of Kraus in describing his relationship to capitalism: "Die kapitalistische Ausbeutung der als Gottes Schöpfung begriffenen Natur und der Raubbau am Wald zur Produktion von Zeitungspapier werden später, unter dem Eindruck des Krieges, zu ständigen, immer wieder variierten Motiven der *Fackel*" (108).

7. On the significance of Kraus's wordplay, Erich Heller has written, "The work of Karl Kraus is rich in words; and every single word is of the greatest possible precision. It is precise through its infinite ambiguity" (239).

8. It should be noted, however, that Kraus's association of seasonal irregularity with the human mistreatment of ecology is eerily prescient.

9. For more thorough engagements with the question of anti-Semitism in "Heine," see Peters, Goltschnigg, and Witte.

10. Kraus composed the embryonic form of "Heine und die Folgen" in 1906, then entitled "Um Heine" (*F* 199), in part as a response to the *Neue Freie Presse* feuilletonist Ludwig Hirschfeld's essay, "Heine als Feuilletonist," one of the many testimonies to the celebratory atmosphere surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of Heine's death. For more on the historical context of the Viennese "Heine Affair," see Goltschnigg, 50–56.

11. This is actually taken from Kraus's homage to Johann Nestroy, written two years later, in which Heine appears as the negative foil to Nestroy's satiric genius.

12. It is not important to consider whether Kraus actually moves beyond what Heine was able to accomplish in his language, but only the stakes of the critique as Kraus poses them. Others, such as Bernd Witte, have already made the argument that Kraus hardly transcends the "feuilletonism" in Heine he so vehemently attacks (31).

13. Adorno, it should be noted, was an admirer of Kraus and echoed the latter's biting critique of Heine verbatim several years later (*Gesammelte Schriften ii*, 95–100).

14. Christopher Thornhill, for example, aligns Kraus's "Ursprungsphilosophie" with the thought of a contemporary (and conservative) philosopher who had influenced Benjamin, Ludwig Klages (6–18).

15. In his reading of Adorno, Heinz Paetzold comes to a similar conclusion when he writes that for Adorno, the "substratum" of art "can be identified as natural beauty, to which authentic works silently refer in order to distance themselves from their own rigid identity" (217).

16. Kraus frequently compared Goethe favorably to Heine. See, for example, Kraus's essay *Die Feinde Goethe und Heine*, whose title he takes from Max Nordau's essay of the same name and to which Kraus satirically responds (*F* 406, 52).

17. For a more thorough analysis of the relationship between Kraus and Adorno, see Djassemy, *Der "Productivgehalt Kritischer Zerstörerarbeit"* and *Die verfolgende Unschuld*.

18. Edward Timms, too, confirms Kraus's predilection for Weimar Classicism and German Romanticism: "Die geistigen Ahnen der 'allumfassenden' Vorstellung der Natur, der wir bei Kraus und Luxemburg begegnen, sind nicht Darwin und Nietzsche, nicht einmal Marx und Engels, sondern Goethe, Schiller, und Mörike" ("'Rächer der Natur'" 63).

19. To limit the scope of this article, I have chosen not to offer a reading of Kraus's own lyric poetry, which would, however, be a relevant object of investigation within this context.

20. Kraus was fond of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* and often chose to recite excerpts from it at his readings. Perhaps lines like: "Plagues incident to men, / Your potent and infectious fevers heap / On Athens, ripe for stroke! Thou cold sciatica, / Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt / As lamely as their manners! [. . .] Itches, blains, / Sow all th' Athenian bosoms, and their crop / Be general leprosy! Breath infect breath, / That their society, as their friendship, may / Be merely poison!," with their imagery of nature sundering the seams of civilization, appealed to Kraus's "inhuman" disposition (iv:12).

21 I am appropriating the term "non–human being," rather than "monster," from Paul Reitter via Gelley's use of it (Gelley 30).

22. When Kraus indicts the journalistic mono-"tone" that accompanies all forms of reportage, he writes, "O, daß ich ihn vor Gericht stellen könnte, diesen Ton!" (*F* 357, 11, 1912). In this way he admits to the predicament of being certain of the guilt of the accused and yet unable to prove this guilt. While it is certainly true that Kraus uses the medium of a journal in order to undermine journalism, this does not mean that there is no difference from Kraus's satire and social critique in the more conventional sense of the term. As Adorno points out, "Vom Moralisieren ist Kraus entbunden. Er kann darauf deuten, wie jegliche Perfidie als Schwachsinn anständiger, auch intelligenter Leute sich durchsetzt, Index seiner eigenen Unwahrheit. Darum die Witze; sie konfrontieren den herrschenden Geist mit seiner Dummheit so unversehens, daß ihm das Argumentieren vergeht, und er geständig wird als das, was er ist" (*Gesammelte Schriften ii*, 380). To his jokes I would add his method of quotation.

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